

Hope is on the Path

- The high hills and low valleys of Christian Publishing in the Mainland



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Publisher (CCL Publishing House)

Hope · Awaiting -- The Door Opening for Christian Publishing

*“Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him.*

*Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. “*

Psalm 62:5-6

Under hardships and persecutions, believers in the mainland finally witnessed the long awaited return of worship music to the Ningbo Centenary Church on 8th April 1979. Waiting begins with hope, but not just in those moving times of church restoration. Looking back to the last 40 years, the visible church not only congregated with the faithful, it evangelized and discipled, and taught believers a life of loving and serving the Lord through Biblical teaching. This impetus that longs to know the Lord became the catalyst for a hope to access more spiritual resources. Our Heavenly Father responded to the prayers of leaders when He opened the door for Christian publishing in China.

Hope · On the Road -- Ever Changing Political Environment, Never Changing Will of God

After the churches had been restored, the Lord called servants who had experienced different degrees of trials to partake in the work of producing spiritual writing. The urgency of the work at that time was a response to the needs of believers towards the Bible in the 80s. Works and resources that pertained to evangelism, discipleship and foundational doctrine were severely lacking at that time. Due to all kinds of restrictions on media channels, there was almost no way to satisfy the needs of the church workers and believers at a time when the church was growing like sprouts in the spring rain.

Though the path is full of thorns, believers continued to hope. When Bibles began to be printed again, various relevant authorities in the mainland began to respond to the need for religious publication, and gradually opened a space for production and distribution. Answering the call of the Lord, Christian Communications Limited has been participating in public publishing ministry since the 90s. At the time, preaching was the main method by which churches in the mainland taught and pastored believers. In response to this, there was an urgent need for hermeneutical and explanatory literature. In 1995, CCL authorized the China Christian Council to distribute the “*The Bible - CGST Study Edition*” edited by the China Graduate School of Theology to all churches in China. In the first two years, distribution reach 200,000 copies. Later, the “*Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (CCL Edition)*” and “*New Bible Commentary 21st Century Edition*” were also published, along with “*Applied New Testament Commentary*” and others. These titles not only became a classic in the libraries of theological seminaries, they also became core books in different curriculum. From 1995 to 2003, CCL published over 22 such works, capturing the needs of the re-opened churches and rapid growth of believers in those first 20 years.





With new national leaders taking over in 2003, in the 10 years between 2003 and 2012, the Lord had continued to give His mercies through different published works to respond to the growth needs of the church. In that period, the variety of genres, channels and professionalisms of published works all increased. Believers could buy books from church bookstores, or even find Christian resources that had

national endorsement, in state or civil bookstores. CCL followed God's guidance closely in opening different channels for publishing, including National Religious Affairs Administration and secular bookstore, and successfully delivered over 40 titles, including commentaries, apologetics, children's books and resources on marriage, to care for the need of frontline pastoral and teaching ministers.

In the blink of an eye, another decade has passed. The leadership once again changed in 2013. Since then, the church has been facing restrictions on children and youth ministry. The location of churches and their mode of congregation is subject to regulations. Moreover, there is severe control on publishing censorship procedures and publishing amount. These different aspects of control deeply affect the church in all areas. Those civil bookstores that had Christian specialties which were previously thriving have come under restrictions which reduce their capacity to supply books for use in church ministry, cut into their revenue, and have been forced onto them a trend of store closure. Individual store owners have even mortgaged their personal assets in struggling to meet operating costs. The environment is highly unfavorable, but the church's hope is in God. In facing restrictions on publishing, CCL workers walk by faith, and witness to God opening ways in a narrowing path. In the past 6 years, CCL has published 19 titles pertaining to discipleship training sets, preaching materials on New and Old Testament theology, Children Sunday school curriculums, material on youth and sexuality, and leadership training. All this is beyond human planning, and we praise God for that!



Hope · Community -- The Restricted Situation, and the Cry of the Soul

The path of publishing is covered in thorns, yet this is just one part of the puzzle of literature ministry, in which reaching and satisfying the souls of people is the final goal. The editor of the mainland edition of “Sweeter Than Honey” is a teacher of the Old Testament at a theological seminary. In the process of editing the book, not only did he grow in his knowledge of the Old Testament, he also applied what he learned in preparing lecture materials. This way he built students’ faith. He was also able to enjoy the content five times and enrich his own spiritual life.

Besides theological education and preaching training, discipleship training for building a strong foundation is an important part of pastoral ministry. When a pastor in Eastern China discovered the discipleship training series of four books of the “Discipleship Essentials”, several young church members who had just entered the workforce and begun ministries in the church had come to his mind. Though in their growth they had never experienced discipleship training, the pastor’s experience compelled him to help these younger believers establish a community of growth and mutual trust relationships. This was a breakthrough from the previous mindset which focused on filling out ministry work and ministry roles at the expense of ignoring those who take up these posts.

To meet a life mentor is a blessing. A group of ministers born in the 80s and 90s chose “*Ruth and Billy Graham: The Legacy of a Couple*” to study in small groups in order to learn and develop the aforementioned 10 core values. Compared with older pastors, they have had better academic and theological training. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of a massive growth in church and shortage of pastors, the book became a silent mentor to them. It even encouraged them to share their lives with each other to encourage mutual growth. In the process, not only did they grow in trust for each other, it led them to explore what it means to establish a community in the church.

Hope · Still on the Path -- Responding to Challenges and Difficulties

Christian literature ministry in the mainland, in publishing and in pastoral ministry, is fraught with challenges. It needs your care and prayers. Firstly, the genre of publishing is closely linked to the needs of frontline pastoral needs. Along with improvements in the

quality of translation and editing standards, it is all the more important for Chinese pastors and scholars who have frontline experience and academic excellence to write books that will effectively address the present needs of churches in the mainland in the long run. Moreover, with increasing restrictions on pastoral ministry, we believe that smaller form teaching materials suitable for discipleship groups, small groups, and even families will become more and more prevalent. Please keep praying for more quality materials of this nature to be developed and produced, with adequate support of professionals and finances. In the long run, publishing channels and the censorship process are still key areas that require the Lord to lead us through.

We hope and pray that those involved in literature ministries are still on the road, running with the Church to its eternal hope!



The Conversion of One Person Blesses the Whole County

© Interviewed and compiled by Yin Qing



In light of the religious situation in the mainland, the itinerary of our visit was changed many times. Finally, we arrived at the central southern region in April and visited two pastors serving rural churches. Pastor Zhao is one of them and most believers in her church are the elderly. Their offering to the church is little, and the church can only pay a meagre salary of several hundred renminbi (RMB) to pastors. However, Pastor Zhao does not mind at all as she firmly believes that God has called upon her to serve in the church of her hometown.

All Things Work Together for Good

The Biblical verse “All Things Work Together for Good” runs through Pastor Zhao’s past and present experiences. She said, “In my younger days, I worked in the city for some 20 years. My husband was in the interior decoration business. After he got rich, he had a mistress. I was devastated. Thank the Lord! The end of man is the beginning of God. At that time, the idea of bringing my daughter back to my home village suddenly came to me. I thought I should also learn more about God and pray for Him to bring my husband back. In the end, my husband did not come back. However, God told me ‘Don’t be afraid, just believe!’ In the seven years after I returned to my home village, I observed that there were not enough trained pastors in our county. I was moved to dedicate myself to serve the Lord. God provided me



Pastor Zhao leads a frugal life, living and having her meals in the church every day.

with a sister who was willing to support me financially in studying theology. In 2012, I attended Bible study classes for a year in the county. In 2013, I enrolled in a programme in the Bible school. I graduated in 2016 and was hired by the church in the county. I live in the church, which means I can save some money. Living there also makes it more convenient for me to serve. Every week, I will ride on my motorbike and go to deliver sermons in three gathering points. The motorbike was bought with the 10,000 RMB that my ex-husband gave me when we got divorced. All things work together for good! Thank the Lord for using my small savings to help me shepherd believers and bless them!”

Becoming a Blessing to the County

After the chat with Pastor Zhao, we talked to her teacher Pastor Zhou who is the vice principal of her Bible school. We tried to understand Pastor Zhao’s ministry from another perspective. Pastor Zhou said, “She is the first pastor in the entire county who studied theology in a Bible school. She is deeply concerned about the spiritual life of her home folks, and invited teachers and classmates in her Bible school to host Bible conferences at her home town, something that has never been done before.

She hoped to rekindle the heart to learn the truth among her brothers and sisters so that they may have a spiritual revival. She also saw that, while there are some 20 churches in the town, there are only a few church leaders and it is difficult to even keep Sunday worships going. Therefore, she encourages the leaders to undergo a

short term (half-year) training in the Bible school. Some 10 or so leaders have been recommended by her in the past three years to study in the Bible school. One thing that touches me deeply is that she is eager to give back to the Bible school. Apart from praying for

the school, she has also led her church to make offerings to the school to support church workers’ training despite her own economic difficulties. She has formed a praying network of a dozen church co-workers to pray and to influence other churches. I believe that she will bring even more blessings to the churches in the county in the future!”



Pastor Zhao attaches importance to the correct exegesis of the Bible and is willing to learn continuously. These are reference books on her desk and are deemed to be a good collection by local standards.

Post-script: We are working hard to raise funds so that we can provide living subsidies to Pastor Zhao and another pastor in order for them to concentrate on serving the church and shepherding believers. Please pray for us and support us.

In 2019, CCL provides living subsidies to 19 pastors in the southwest, northern and central regions of the mainland based on their needs and the standards of living in the places they serve. The total fundraising target is US\$102,565. Please act now and make an offering to support these pastors. Thank you!



Prayers

1. Stand Firm in Ministry

The recent controversy over the extradition law amendment bill in Hong Kong exposed concerns about religious exchanges, social services and business activities in China being used as a cause for extradition to China. The Hong Kong government finally shelved the bill after major protests in the past weeks.



May the Lord give peace and wisdom to workers concerned about China ministry, and give them opportunities to serve.

2. Literature Ministry



With the narrowing scope for the mainland Christian publishing industry, those involved in the literature ministry need to be flexible and prepared for a drop in publication channels. Official vetting is also expected to become more stringent.

May the Lord help workers keep their faith; may He also guide them to produce publications that can meet the needs of various ministries, such as discipleship training, small groups, or even family-based ministries.

3. The Business Sector as an Evangelical Platform

While it is hard for overseas agencies to operate in China, many Christian leaders outside China have set up their own companies or formed with mainland churches or believers to develop businesses in areas such as interior design, catering, arts/music studio,



coffee shop, hostels etc. to reach out to young and middle-aged workers.

May the Lord guide the Christian business people to witness for Him, share the power of the gospel and bless the local community in a tightly controlled environment. May the Lord bless and sustain the businesses!

4. Pollution from Coal



Due to the development of heavy industry, the Chinese government has been very concerned about the issue of pollution. Several months ago, an ecological environment protection inspection team found serious pollution problems in Shanxi province, where the coking of coal is an important industry. The process of heating coal under high temperature to produce coke results in air and water pollution.

May the Lord protect the people in Shanxi as well as across the nation, since pollutants can damage human cells and the farming environment, and enter the food chain. May the Lord give wisdom to local authorities, which should impose heavy penalty on factories breaching environmental protection rules and offer support to factories that are willing to reduce pollution.

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